

**State Board of Education
Summary of Transformation Discussion with Students from Central Vermont
October 16, 2007**

Members of the State Board of Education met on the morning of Tuesday, October 16th with approximately 40 students to begin a public engagement process regarding the future of education in Vermont. This discussion was kicked off by the release of *The Future of Education in Vermont*, an education transformation discussion document recently adopted by the State Board of Education. Facilitated by Department of Education staff members, students were split into five groups to respond to three questions:

- What has really worked for me in school?
- What has been challenging for me in school?
- What would make school a better place for students to learn?

Students from several central Vermont high schools, alternative education and community-based learning programs reported similar themes of what works well for them currently, including

- flexible scheduling,
- building (sustaining) relationships with communities and school staff,
- independent study,
- real-world connections,
- student empowerment,
- a variety of options and pathways, and
- exploratory learning experiences.

There were several positive endorsements of the opportunities provided by technical centers, as students enrolled full or part-time at tech centers found them to be positive, challenging and worthwhile learning environments.

Several themes emerged regarding what is currently a challenge to student learning. It is the students' hope that the Board will consider modifying or eliminating some of these existing barriers including:

- testing,
- cliques and stereotypes,
- block scheduling,
- outdated materials and technology,
- one-size-fits-all instruction,
- too much or meaningless homework
- lack of support from guidance,
- unappetizing food, and
- a lack of respect within school walls.

The most significant theme was that of time: students found there is not enough time during the day between classes, not enough time after school to handle the several hours of homework, not enough time in their schedules to take the courses they wanted or needed, and not enough time to do more in-depth study on topics of interest. Students found this hurt their home relationships,

their ability to participate in after-school activities, and their ability to return to school each day ready to learn more.

Students were able to brainstorm a variety of ideas of what would make the current system a better place to learn. These ideas included

- a positive, comfortable learning environment, accommodating different learning styles, making opportunities such as technical centers better-known,
- more efficient scheduling and classrooms,
- student/teacher relationship support,
- respect for and inclusion of diversity in the learning environment,
- community-school connections,
- flexibility and variety,
- eliminating required courses,
- alternate options for graduation,
- individualized learning and instruction,
- less bullying and fair punishment,
- less homework, and a connection to real-life.

Home study students echoed applauded individual pacing and instruction as well as personal choice in what studies to pursue.

Much of the time on the next few State Board monthly meeting agendas will be dedicated to similar conversations between State Board members and representatives of various constituent groups. Future meetings will include teachers, principals, superintendents, school board members, legislators and other political leaders, representatives of the business community and other constituent groups. The public is encouraged to participate in the process – the desired state document can be viewed and comments can be made at http://education.vermont.gov/new/html/dept/future_of_education.html.